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ABSTRACT

A brief biography is presented of Henry Barnard, one of the leading educators in America during the first half of the 19th century. An early and forceful advocate of free public education, Barnard promulgated his ideas through public service and teaching as well as through writings in "The American Journal of Education," which he edited between 1855 and 1881. Through this medium, scholars communicated and found a means for confronting massive resistance to the development of public schools in the United States. (JD)

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THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHER EDUCATION: A PROFILE OF HENRY BARNARD

Ruskin Teeter

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The Historical and Social Significance of Teacher Education: A Profile of Henry Barnard. By Ruskin Teeter, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203. This paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Chicago, February 27 - March 1, 1986.

On its face, the educational work of Henry Barnard would appear to have little relevance to the educational climate in America today. Yet Barnard, perhaps even more than Horace Mann, was present at the creation of our profession, and indeed did more through his journal to promote the idea of teacher education than any other single individual, past or present. In a very real sense, Barnard can be considered the "father" of our vast "teacher education establishment," and his work, even today, is believed to be of considerable historical and social significance.

Barnard was an unabashed supporter of the status quo - in all but education. Indeed his educational experiences constituted a cross-section of American schooling in the first half of the 19th Century. In an amazing similarity to Mann, Barnard had excelled in college despite a "miserable" district school background, taught school just as briefly, and then studied law. He too was elected to his state legislature, and there helped obtain passage of a law establishing a State Board of Education. Barnard then became secretary of the State Board at age 27, and took up the same duties as had been prescribed from Mann the previous year in neighboring Massachusetts. Barnard's subsequent study of conditions in the Connecticut district schools, for which he was paid $3 per day, confirmed that they had "sunk into a deplorable state." Not one family in a hundred, he reported, relied upon district schools for the education of their children. Moreover, more money was spent on the private education

of 12,000 students than on almost 60,000 who attended public schools. Only slightly more than half the state's children between 6 and 16 attended school with any regularity, and 8,000 did not attend at all. He chose the same means that Mann was using. In more than 400 visits to schools around the state, and in more than 100 meetings, with every school organization in Connecticut, he spoke out for better school buildings, libraries, and equipment, for greater textbook uniformity, and for better teacher preparation. As objectionable as normal schools later became, they were at the time a godsend, so utterly poor was most teaching. Hundreds of Connecticut schools were eventually improved because of Barnard's efforts.

Unlike Mann, Barnard did not survive the efforts of reform opponents in the legislature. But when they abolished his job he moved on to a similar position in Rhode Island. There he found opposition to public schools to be even stronger. One state legislator declared that his district would never tax itself for schools, not even "at the point of a bayonet," and another stated that one "might as well take a man's ox to plow his neighbor's field as to take his money to educate his neighbor's son." As a result of such attitudes, more than a third of the state's schoolhouses were "absolutely unfit for habitation." Of the fit houses, 200 had no blackboards, maps, globes, clocks, or thermometers, while 270 did not even have windows for ventilation. Worst of all, school rarely met for more than two or three months out of the year.

In time, Barnard saw to it that many of these schools lengthened their terms. The "old delapidated, repulsive, inconvenient houses," he later wrote, gave way to "new neat, attractive and commodious structures." Indeed, Rhode Island soon came to have one of the highest ratios of

acceptable school buildings in the nation. Barnard also helped obtain tax support for schools, and distributed thousands of pamphlets on the subject of school libraries, recommending that they shelve a minimum of 500 volumes per school. He not only argued for teacher training and special teacher institutes, but also for the support of model traveling schools for backcountry people unfamiliar with even the idea of schooling. Barnard's method of publicizing his cause was bolder--and perhaps more impressive to that generation--than was Mann's. For several years, he sponsored the eccentric W.S. Baker's traveling "circus," which went about through the New England backcountry in a covered wagon "selling" education much the same as other traveling shows sold snake oil. Baker would pull into a small settlement with a dozen of his best students, set up blackboards, ring a bell, and hold a session of school. Large crowds gathered and students "showed off," drawing maps, figuring coordinates, computing sums, spelling, and otherwise delighting the appreciative rustics. This kind of showmanship effectively convinced local skeptics of the value of education, and made the idea of tax supported schools much more palatable to a segment of the population that had opposed public schools the most. Barnard himself conducted more than 1,100 meetings and delivered more than 1,500 speeches throughout the state, prompting one observer to estimate that a meeting to promote public schools had been held within three miles of every home during Barnard's stay there. These efforts evidently impressed his former colleagues in Connecticut as well. After seven years in Rhode Island, he resumed his work there, once again as secretary of the State Board of Education.

Barnard, unlike Mann, was essentially a scholar. He is especially remembered for his editorship of the massive, 31-volume American Journal of Education. It was one of the most ambitious literary ventures of the

19th Century, and may be the most permanently significant educational journal ever published in the United States. The issues appeared quarterly between 1855 and 1881, by which time they totaled almost 24,000 pages and 12 million words. Now a standard work in college libraries, the Journal set occupies more than six feet of shelving. In 1878, the Encyclopaedia Britannica called Barnard's Journal "by far the most valuable work in our language on the history of education," and even two thirds of a century later the Cambridge History of American Literature declared the Journal unsurpassed in "magnitude, scope and quality." Through it, the History declared, "Barnard exerted widespread influence on the developing educational interests of America." That, indeed, had been Barnard's purpose in founding the Journal. Like Mann, he was convinced that education was a burgeoning profession that would require a substantial, sound literature. A scholarly national publication, he believed, could quicken the pace of professionalism, elevate teaching to a respectable calling, and promote public schools in general. It could be a clearing house for the exchange of ideas, and a national forum for the consideration of important educational issues. Such a journal could spread the educational experiences of New England and Europe to all parts of the United States, most particularly to the underdeveloped Southern region. In brief, the Journal could be an instrument to build up a new profession.

Barnard was ideally qualified to edit the Journal. His scholarly interests and intellectual abilities had won him a Phi Beta Kappa key at Yale. He traveled widely in America and Europe, and he knew most of the leading intellectuals of his day on both sides of the Atlantic. He visited Europe five times where particularly in Germany he found much of value that could be adapted to American schools. His Journal published many accounts

of European practices, and present day compulsory education, grading practices, teacher training institutions, methodology, and teacher supervision are all ideas lifted directly from German schools via Barnard's Journal. In addition to very omnivorous reading in the theories of education, he could draw on the practical knowledge gained while working on two state boards of education. By virtue of an inherited fortune, he was able to take editorial and financial risks. He did not sacrifice quality for reason of expense, even though hundreds of dollars per volume were paid from his own pocket. The quality and quantity of Journal publications undoubtedly enhanced Barnard's reputation. He subsequently became not only president of two colleges but the first U.S. commissioner of education.

Barnard's Journal embraced "only articles of permanent value and interest." It eventually included the equivalent of more than 100 treatises on every subject in education history, biography, organization, administration, principles and practices. Among the articles widely read even today include "The Boston Latin Grammar School," "New England Academies," Biographical Sketch of Horace Mann," "Universities of the Middle Ages," "Schools and Education in Ancient Greece," "Princes in France-Their Education and Teachers," and "Aristotle and His Educational Views."

Significantly, the Journal was seldom read by teachers. Not only was its moderate price more than most could pay, but they tended to be "unimaginative plodders" rather than scholars or intellectuals. Horace Mann wrote to Barnard that "most of our people are not up to the level at which you aim." Despite such appeals, however, Barnard never compromised editorial standards for the sake of popularity or to increase circulation. This averaged, incidentally, only about 500 copies per issue. Barnard's primary concern was with the Journal's impact, not its profitability. Although the Journal's

readership was small, it was world-wide.

The question of public schools was an integral part of the other movements in that Age of the Common Man. Americans were moving westward in unprecedented numbers. Opened up as it was to settlers from up and down the Atlantic seaboard, and to tens of thousands of immigrants as well, the entire upper Mississippi valley was the scene of one of history's great hegiras. Wherever the settlers went--to a muddy settlement of 175 houses called Chicago, or to the hog-infested, muddy streets of an even smaller village called Cincinnati, they had to consider school reform. Following a land boom in 1837, New England lumbermen left by the hundreds for Minnesota, then little more than a primitive game reservation for another immigrant, entrepreneur John Jacob Astor. Those who followed took with them the idea of free schools. In 1834 in nearby Wisconsin, settlers plotted three small villages on a map of the Milwaukee River. By the time they were incorporated as the town of Milwaukee 12 years later, a campaign for free schools had already been waged and won. When the state was admitted to the Union in 1848, its new constitution provided for free education for everyone between ages 4 and 20. Michigan also drew settlers from New York and New England who established schools on the New England model. When Michigan was admitted to the Union, there were both constitutional and statutory provisions for education.

The movement veritably exploded thereafter. Missouri established a public school system in 1839, and the Territory of Oregon began operating free schools in 1850. Free public schools were established in Indiana in 1852. In 1855, the First Territorial Legislature of Nebraska adopted its free school law, as did the state of Illinois the same year. Iowa provided free schools for its inhabitants in 1858. Some territories did not wait for

statehood: the legislature of Kansas acted in 1859, and that of Dakota provided free schools in 1862.

Everywhere, though, conservative opposition to free schools persisted, just as it did in the other social and political reforms of the period. Many people had not yet shaken off the idea that public schools, like public housing today, were for paupers. They believed that education was something of a frill, a luxury to be purchased according to one's ability and willingness to pay. Others believed that the masses, the great unwashed, were morally and even intellectually unfit for education; and that in any case they had no real need of it. Anticipating the elitist rationale of our own time, some condemned them as "forced schools." Contestants in the free school debate divided along class and ideological lines. Opponents saw no reason why the "thrifty" should have to buy schooling for the "shiftless," and many stated frankly and publicly that free schools rewarded the poor who likely were poor because they deserved to be so. One Watertown, New York, opponent of free schools said that he would "fill the belly" or "cover the back" of a pauper, but he would never send him to school. In the sense that health today is considered a private and not a public matter, education was then considered a personal matter--to be bought and paid for according to one's station and financial position.

As could be expected in that age of newborn evangelical religions, public schools were denounced by many preachers defending the social status quo. The pious Mann was accused of atheism, and many predicted that his schools would produce a generation of "irreligious and infidel youth." In a sermon called "The Ark of God on a New Cart," the Reverend Matthew Hale Smith blamed school reformers for an increase in juvenile crime in Boston. No wonder, said others: children educated beyond their stations in life were rootless beings belonging

to no class. The more gullible rural parishoners agreed: Children, observed one, "should pass their days in the cotton patch, or at the plow, or in the cornfield instead of being mewed up in a schoolhouse." Bigots, intolerants, aristocrats and monopolists, seemed to be working in tandem to discredit the movement. Few had the larger vision of one conservative leader, Daniel Webster, who regarded education as "a wise and liberal system of police, by which property and life and the peace of society are secured." Indeed, the cause of economic stability and social peace had been an important factor in the founding of public schools on the western frontier. If schools were not used as "a means of teaching frontier folk sound economic doctrines," one observer warned his fellow citizens, pocketbooks would be emptied by a repudiation of credit. Noting developments in Europe instead of at home, a fearful pundit predicted that the reformers would bankrupt and "Prussianize" the United States, open it up to "infidel socialism," and drive it as far as Fourierism (communism).

Opposition arose from less lofty sources than ideology. Immigrants, for example, feared that their children would forget their native traditions and customs when placed in multi-ethnic American schools. Nativists were obsessed with that same vision, arguing that because immigrants were the poor segment of any community, the taxes of established citizens would be grieviously wasted to educate the uninvited hordes, newcomers who multiplied "like rabbits in a burrow," who would undermine society. One prominent Hoosier even directed that his tombstone should read: "Here lies an enemy of free schools." Disingenuous opponents asserted that free schools would do the poor an actual disservice. Repeating the adage that nothing was valued highly if it was obtained for nothing, such schools would undermine respect for those who had obtained fortune and status through private education.

(To be sure, men of fortune and status were among the ranks of the reformers as well).

Perhaps the most serious opposition came from the conservative leaders of the South who considered the movement for educational reform as another example of the forces that were threatening that region's very existence. One of the ominous signs of the sectional controversy that worsened in the 1850's was the removal by prominent families of their sons and daughters from the schools of the Northeast. In the latter area, those who viewed all reforms as part of a great effort to better the nation itself generally supported the cause of Union. After a half million men upheld that cause on the battlefields of the Civil War, several of those same reformers recognized a great opportunity for education in the devastated South. In the tradition of Mann and Barnard they would strive as mightily, but they would have far leaner success.